

RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

BIBLICAL, PASTORAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITORS

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RECONCILIATION IN BURUNDI CRISIS

A Practical Theological Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Situated in east-central Africa, Burundi is a small landlocked country of 10,750 square miles (27,830km²) that accommodates a population of around 10 million people belonging to three ethnic groups, namely: Hutus (85%), Tutsis (14%), and Twas (1%) (Lemarchand, 1995). Its neighbouring countries are Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Although these three ethnic groups share the same culture and mother tongue, Burundi has experienced a sequence of ethnic conflicts (Lemarchand, 1995). Various attempts to deal with the ethnic conflicts have been put in place but these have failed to achieve sustainable peace. The current situation has raised concern. This chapter looks at the history of conflicts in Burundi and suggests the role of practical theology in bringing about reconciliation to the nation.

THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT IN BURUNDI

Long before independence, the Burundian community was united and peaceful. This is emphasised by the fact that during the pre-colonial period, all the ethnic groups living in Burundi were under one king (*Umwami*), believing in the same god (*Imana*), sharing the same culture, and speaking the same language (*Kirundi*), as they lived together in the same territory (Hatungimana, 2011). In addition, people in Burundi recognised themselves as *Barundi* despite the fact that the different ethnic groups had settled in Burundi at different times (Ntahombaye & Nduwayo, 2007). There were no known severe ethnic conflicts during the pre-colonial period. In the case of minor conflicts, there existed an institution of *Bashingantahe*, the council of the elders coming from among the *Baganwa*, the *Bahutu* and the *Batutsi* who were judges and advisors at all levels of power in order to settle the conflicts in the community.² Therefore, the question that arises is, where did the ethnic conflicts in Burundi come from?

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2 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. (2000). Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2HN9b3a> [Accessed 20 May 2017]. (Hereafter, Arusha Agreement).

Until its independence in 1962, Burundi was firstly part of a German colony (1897-1916) and, after Germany's defeat in the First World War it was placed under Belgian trusteeship (1916-1962) (Daley, 2000). During the colonial period, the colonial administration played a pivotal role in exacerbating the ethnic divisions by putting in place a strategy based on morphology in terms of physical characteristics and character traits to help them execute a divide and rule plan that resulted in tensions between the ethnic groups (Vandeginste, 2014; Arusha Agreement, 2000). In this way, the Tutsi minority, being considered by the colonisers as higher in status than the Hutu majority, were given the privilege of education and administration, which frustrated the Hutus. The colonisers established the demarcations by defining Tutsis as tall, thin, and with a sharp straight nose, while Hutus are known to be short, big, and with a big flat nose; even though there are Tutsis with the same characteristics as Hutus, and vice versa (Hatungimana, 2011). To make matters worse, the colonisers introduced an identity card pointing out ethnic origin, allowing them to treat each ethnic group differently, thereby destroying cultural values that promoted national unity and cohesion (Arusha, 2000). In 1934, a census by the Belgian colonisers complicated the social boundaries even more. Furthermore, cows had acquired more value than other Burundian products. Persons owing more than ten cows were arbitrarily classified as Tutsi. As a result, relatively wealthy Hutu suddenly became Tutsi, and some poorer Tutsi became Hutu. Ethnic identity cards were issued freezing Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa social identities into law and ethnic groups. Already identified with relative deprivation, Hutu and Twa became strongly associated with poverty and powerlessness. The census classified 85% of the population as Hutu, 14% as Tutsi, and 1% as Twa (Ndayizigiye, 2005). These percentages of the population provided by the Belgian colonial government have been almost universally accepted although the percentages and ethnic distinctions are themselves only approximations (Krueger & Krueger, 2007).

As a result, the Belgian colonisers favoured the Tutsi whom they regarded as 'born to rule', while the Hutu were 'born to farm' (Walters, 2008), so that the Tutsi minority took control and oppressed the Hutu majority, a situation that caused severe ethnic tensions after the independence of Burundi on the 1st of July 1962 (Lemarchand, 1995).

As a matter of fact, when Burundi gained independence from the Belgian government in 1962, the Tutsis took control of the government with Louis Rwagasore, the hero of independence, becoming the first Prime Minister. After a few weeks, Rwagasore was assassinated by his own people (Tutsis) and was then replaced by Andre Muhirwa, his brother-in-law. The rule of Tutsis never gave any regard to the Hutus. During an election in 1964, Pierre Ngendandumwe, a Hutu, won and became Prime Minister. The Tutsis did not accept to be ruled by a Hutu Prime Minister, and therefore assassinated him in 1965. Ngendandumwe's assassination sparked anger among the Hutus who then started a rebellion which was immediately violently put down. In 1966 Michel Micombero, a Tutsi army chief, launched a coup that replaced the monarchy with military rule. His party, UPRONA, was declared the only legal party in the country and this resulted in more Hutu deaths (Lemarchand, 1995). Furthermore, a civil war in 1972 resulted in the mass killing of about 300,000 Hutus while many others fled to the neighbouring countries. In 1992, the United Nations

enticed President Pierre Buyoya to introduce a multi-party democracy. In this way, the first democratic elections saw President Melchior Ndadaye elected as the first Hutu president in 1993. Three months after his inception as president, Ndadaye was assassinated by the army which was still controlled by Tutsis. The death of Ndadaye angered the Hutus who then decided to take up arms against the Tutsi army. This led to a severe civil war that resulted in a lot of deaths and refugees (Lemarchand, 1995). The civil war continued until the Arusha Peace Agreement in which all political actors in Burundi were invited to take part in order to find lasting solutions through negotiations that started in 1998 and led to the agreement that was signed on 28 August 2000 (Hatungimana, 2011).

The Arusha Peace Agreement made provision for a democratic power sharing among the ethnic groups in the army and government in order to achieve ethnic balance and to prevent acts of genocide and coups d'état (military coups) by providing for civilian supremacy over military matters and for the ongoing adjustment of imbalances in the composition of the defense and security forces (Vandeginste, 2015; Hatungimana, 2011; Arusha Agreement, 2000:39). This was put in place in order "to reconcile and unite Burundians and lay the foundations for a democratic and united Burundi, inter alia by promoting a broad programme of education in peace, democracy and ethnic tolerance" (Arusha Agreement, 2000). Eventually, the Arusha Agreement enabled Burundians to achieve a conflict resolution geared towards politico-ethnic reconciliation and pacification in which ethnicity is no longer a tool to justify violence (Vandeginste, 2015). This was achieved by crafting a constitution that favours the majority, while at the same time protecting the minority groups, so that the 2005 and 2010 elections were no longer primarily a matter of ethnic competition. This was quite an achievement in a country torn apart by politico-ethnic strife for decades (Vandeginste, 2015). In this way, the problem of ethnic conflicts in Burundi was solved by recognising and naming each person by his/her ethnicity and giving them the dignity that is due to them. The Burundi power-sharing agreement was instrumental in playing a dual role in leading to the termination of war and creating a more inclusive political governance. It has been considered as the best peace-building achievement on the African continent (IRIS, 2016; Vandeginste, 2015).

As a result, a coalition government was set up after the 2005 elections which saw the CNDD-FDD, a former Hutu rebel movement led by President Pierre Nkurunziza, to ascend to power. According to the new constitution, the President was only allowed two terms in office. In 2010, after the first term, the transition to peace suffered a significant blow as most of the opposition parties boycotted the presidential elections after alleging that the ruling party had rigged the first round of elections, a situation that gave an opportunity for President Pierre Nkurunziza to run unopposed and gain an overwhelming victory with 91% of the votes cast (Vandeginste, 2015).

After the 2010 elections, the political situation in Burundi started deteriorating. In November 2013, the Burundian government initiated a constitutional amendment process which was perceived and feared by the public as an attempt to do away with the Arusha Agreement in order to scrap presidential term limits (Omondi, 2015; Vandeginste, 2015). Eventually the parliament, by a single vote in 2014, rejected the

government's proposal to amend the constitution (IRIS, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2016). Still, President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to campaign for a third term of office, thereby sparking massive protests against his decision in April 2015 which was followed by violence, fear, socio-economic decline and deepening social fractures; with urban guerrilla-like warfare and a failed coup attempt on 13 May 2015, resulting in a rise of targeted assassinations, torture and disappearances. More than 250,000 became refugees including most of the opposition leaders (Impunity Watch, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2016).

The decision taken by President Pierre Nkurunziza to campaign for a third term was criticised by many stakeholders including the opposition, the international community, and even some from his own government and party (International Crisis Group, 2016). Consequently, the exiled opposition joined hands and formed a coalition known as the National Council for the Restoration of the Arusha Accord and the Rule of Law (*Conseil National pour le Respect de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Burundi et de l'Etat de Droit*) (CNARED) in order to oppose the third term of President Pierre Nkurunziza (International Crisis Group, 2016). President Nkurunziza's third term caused a lot of concern both locally and internationally, making it unclear as to why he had decided to breach the term limit set by the Arusha Agreement. There can be different answers given for his conduct. For example, it is asserted that "in Burundi, just like in some other African countries, politics is likened to a milking cow, an appointment to a political position is likened to the securing of something to eat or a place where one can stay forever" (Ntahombaye & Nduwayo, 2007:246). In this way, some African leaders are "known for their reluctance to leave office and one way they ensure to stay on is by amending the constitution. Thus, when constitutions have been amended 'presidents for life' are again installed, with a bad reputation of eliminating of opposition, narrowing of the political field, establishing personal armies, often looting national wealth and using the constitution to consolidate personal power" (Botha, 2012:30). In fact, while remaining in power has been the practice of most African presidents over the years, it is noted that between 2000 and 2015 alone, fifteen African leaders attempted to adjust the constitutions by doing away with term limits (Le Bas, 2016).

Taking the example of the Great Lakes region where Burundi is located, President Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986 and is among the longest serving presidents in Africa. He ended up tabling a motion to change the constitution and remove term limits in 2005, thereby being allowed to continue campaigning for presidency and winning his fifth term in the 2016 elections, with a desire to remain in power at least until 2035 (Dulani, 2011).³ On the other side, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda tabled a constitutional change by a referendum in 2015, which allowed him not only to be re-elected for a third term in 2017, but also to continue campaigning for presidency until 2034, and, after that, remain excepted from prosecution for any

3 See also The Electoral Commission of Uganda. (2016). 2015/2016 General Elections Report. Submitted to Parliament through the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in accordance with the provisions of Section 12 (1) (o) of the Electoral Commission Act, Cap 140 (as amended). Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2w36K9S> [Accessed 18 June 2017].

serious crimes (Bardall & Arieff, 2017). This move that created fear among many people who thought it would create havoc and endanger the development already achieved in that country (Mbaku, 2017; IRIS, 2016). Eventually, President Kagame won his third term with 99% of the votes in the 2017 elections in which he was not contested after the Rwandan Electoral Commission disqualified three of the opposition candidates (Bardall & Arieff, 2017). Also in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), President Joseph Kabila's refusal to step down after his two terms in 2016 caused havoc in the country and resulted in the negotiations that added a year to his term in office to allow a smoother transition of power (IRIS, 2016:10; Mbiattem, 2015). An agreement to extend President Kabila's term in office until the end of 2017 was mediated by the Catholic Church and signed between him and the opposition groups. However, the elections have been postponed to 23 December 2018, a decision that has caused deadly protests.⁴ Looking at all these examples, President Nkurunziza of Burundi did not hesitate to sacrifice the hard earned peace by going ahead with the 2015 elections that allowed him to run unopposed and be re-elected for a third term amidst opposition boycotts and protests (IRIS, 2016; Lebas, 2016). Furthermore, President Nkurunziza has been campaigning for a constitution referendum to be held in May 2018. The new constitution to be rectified provides for a seven year term instead of five, and President Nkurunziza is allowed to vie for the 2020 elections.⁵ The situation in Burundi has thereby become so unbearable that it requires urgent attention.

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH IN THE CRISIS IN BURUNDI

The church in Burundi has been instrumental in holding the government accountable, especially in condemning the massacres and other evils threatening the society. For example, the Catholic Church leaders quickly condemned ethnic massacres in the 1970s and spoke out for the population (Riedl, 2015). During the reign of President Bagaza, when the political space was tight, the church became the only stronghold defending freedom of speech; even though this bravery brought a lot of consequences such as threats and attacks directed towards the Bishops and catechists as well as their relatives, resulting in the nationalisation of seminaries and banning of charismatic community meetings in 1986 (Prunier, 1994). At the same time, the state took over the civil society organisations to reinforce state ideology. As Krueger and Krueger (2007:29) assert, "To Bagaza, all Christian churches represented challenges to his dictatorial authority and were therefore enemies of the state. Consequently, he confiscated church properties, banished most missionaries, and directly controlled all religious practices." As a result, youth and women associations as well as labour unions became the property of the single party government and were used as instruments of propaganda to brainwash the citizens in order to privilege the state. As the Catholic Church provided education to the people, it was

4 Cf. 'UN Urges DR Congo Leader to Keep Promise to Step Down', *Gulf Times*, 1 January 2018. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/37Vt6aN> [Accessed 25 January 2018].

5 'Burundi to hold referendum of constitution in May 2018: electoral commission', *Xinhua*, 6 December 2017. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2Tj3vo1> [Accessed 25 January 2018].

viewed as a threat and a potential vehicle for alternative beliefs. This influence of the church was challenged by the fact that some clergy often served as the agents of the state (Ndikumana, 2005).

Nevertheless, the church did not stop its involvement in the resolution of conflicts, supporting the war victims, street kids, orphans and demobilised child soldiers to find safe place and rehabilitation. In this way, the church has offered significant support to the government in terms of caring for the poor, providing free education for all, as well as free medical care for children under five years as well as maternity fees for mothers.⁶ In the same way, Ubuntu Centre, a Burundian NGO has been created by the Catholic Church to collaborate with UNICEF in order to work on peacebuilding and to deal with violence among youth, discrimination, as well as promoting dialogue between the conflicting ethnic groups (Haro, 2016). Another organisation put in place by the Quaker Church and supported by the Mennonite and Church of Friends is called The Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation under the Cross (MI-PAREC). This organisation started in 1998 and deals with training in conflict management and peacebuilding, especially targeting the youth who, being easily manipulated by adults and political leaders, are known as the most active in violence. The organisation contributes to the management of the post-conflict through socio-economic reintegration and rehabilitation (Musser, 2015; Niyonkuru, 2012).

Furthermore the Catholic Church has established Radio Maria, a radio station and Ndongozi, a newspaper in order to influence the situation by acting as a herald for the population.⁷

Even when President Pierre Nkurunziza wanted to campaign for a third term the Catholic Church did not hesitate to stand up and speak against the President's violation of the constitution. The Catholic Church leaders issued a statement in a pastoral letter that was circulated and read in the congregations across the country (Riedl, 2015). Their standpoint did not please President Nkurunziza, a "born-again" charismatic preacher and pastor who believes that God has appointed him to run for the third term so that "anyone opposed to his third term is opposing the will of God."⁸ The decision by the leaders of the Catholic Church in Burundi to challenge the President's bid for a third term became dangerous for the Catholic Bishops, with several of them receiving death threats or being detained for opposing the president's decision to run for the third term.⁹ Consequently, the Catholic Church

- 6 Anglican Peace and Justice Network. (2007). *Community Transformation: Violence and the Church's Response*. Anglican Peace and Justice Network in Rwanda and Burundi. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2vZnX4I> [Accessed 26 August 2017].
- 7 Media Support. (2015). *Burundi's Media During the 2015 Election Crisis*. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2HSdqdT> [Accessed 26 August 2017].
- 8 *Catholic Herald*. (2015). 'Violence Increases as Burundi's President Announces He Will Run Again.' Catholic News Service, April 28, 2015. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2SR0nzF> [Accessed 26 August 2017].
- 9 International Religious Freedom. (2015). Burundi 2015 International Religious Freedom Report. Viewed from <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256211.pdf>. [Accessed 15 August 2017].

decided to withdraw its priests appointed to assist in organising the elections which are seen to be full of shortcomings (Niyungeko, 2015).

On the other hand, ethnic differences are not absent in the church. For example, The Catholic Church during and after the colonial period was closely aligned with Belgium, and its hierarchical structure reflected values and practices similar to those of the ruling colonial power. Thus, just as Tutsis were identified in Brussels as those deserving education and positions of leadership in secular society, so, in Rome, Tutsis had been similarly identified as the natural leaders of the church in Burundi. Tutsis therefore composed most of the priesthood, especially its highest positions. Even so, by the 1990s the times were a-changing in the church as they were elsewhere, and the Vatican began naming Hutus as bishops. To some Tutsis, naming a Hutu bishop was seen as a direct and intentional insult (Krueger & Krueger, 2007).

This reality was also a contributing factor during the war, especially in 1972 during the massacres of educated Hutus. Missionaries from Europe witnessed the killings even in confessional schools (both Catholic and Protestants) as well as in churches, with twelve Hutu priests reported to be killed, along with thousands of Protestant pastors, school directors and teachers (Lemarchand, 2008).

This situation has also been observed during the war that followed the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye in 1993. As Kopwe (2013:187) posits, the church was very polarised, with the majority of church leaders being Tutsi with most of the Hutu church leaders being in exile. The problem became worse when the church leaders in the country worked with the army and politicians while the church leaders in exile worked with the rebels (Kopwe, 2013).¹⁰ It was only during the reconciliation period that this situation was alleviated; as Kopwe (2013) further relates, "In the process of dealing with the pain of the people, a number of actors were involved. On the local scene, individual church denominations which co-operated within the Christian Council of Burundi (CNEB) and their foreign partners were very active in spite of the deep mire of pain and division; local organisations like Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS) and World Outreach Initiatives (WOI) were in the forefront of seeking the healing of the nation. Many organisations from outside Burundi joined hands with local entities in search for solutions. One of these organisations was African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE), working in partnership with the above-mentioned local entities." Thus, it is fair to say that the church was instrumental in dealing with the conflicts in Burundi. However, there is also a negative side to be dealt with in order for the church to make a significant contribution in alleviating the ethnic tensions the country is facing.

10 The author witnessed the division in the church, whereby church leaders betrayed each other in conspiracies that even cost the lives of others in the opposite ethnic group. For example, in Nyanza-Lac, a town along Lake Tanganyika in the Province of Makamba, a Senior Pastor in the Pentecost was seen celebrating the death of President Melchior Ndadaye. As a result, members of the church were angry with him and decided not to sit in the church service with him. On a Sunday service, the people complained and made a revolt that was meant to chase the Senior Pastor from the church but because of the connection he had with the army, many people were arrested and executed. As a result, another church, the EUSEBU, was born.

THE POLITICAL ATTEMPT TO DEAL WITH THE CURRENT CRISIS IN BURUNDI

The escalation of violence in Burundi calls for diplomatic efforts and political solutions to ensure that the crisis does not turn into another long war as Burundians increasingly face pressure in the current climate of fear, militarisation and violence (IRIS, 2016; Impunity Watch, 2016). In this regard, the polarised African Union (AU) decided to authorise the deployment of an African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU), a decision that was virulently rejected by the President and government of Burundi (Bouka & Nyabola, 2016; Impunity Watch, 2016). In addition, the AU has requested a dialogue between the Burundi government and opposition, but such a dialogue has so far not yielded any fruit since the government has been refusing to sit at the negotiating table with CNARED whom it accuses of being the perpetrators of the failed coup of 13 May 2015 (Impunity Watch, 2016; IRIS, 2016).

In spite of the President and government's refusal to engage in a dialogue with the opposition, it is widely believed that dialogue is the most important strategy to bring an end to conflict and violence prevailing in Burundi (Impunity Watch, 2016). As a matter of fact, peace negotiations have been underway, while some have lost trust in the mediation process as neither the government nor the heavily fragmented opposition are making honest overtures towards its resolution (IRIS, 2016).

A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CRISIS IN BURUNDI

Louw (2008:71) describes the nature and the task of Practical Theology as follows: "Practical theology is the science of the theological, critical and hermeneutical reflection on the intention and meaning of human actions as expressed in the practice of ministry and the heart of faithful daily living. It is related to life skills within the realm of spirituality. In this regard Practical Theology is connected to the praxis and will of God within the encounter of God and human beings." Reflecting on Louw's understanding, it is fair to say that Practical Theology has to do with the relationship between God and man; God appears to His people and communicates to them His Word which must be contextually interpreted and understood in order to be applied to the people's context, and must then be communicated to them so that it influences their lives.

Furthermore, Practical Theology can be interpreted as being instrumental in making the Word of God relevant to people's lives, which calls for a hermeneutical approach. With regard to the relationship between Practical Theology and a hermeneutical approach, Hendriks (2004) and Polling (2010) see Practical Theology as a continuing hermeneutical concern that discerns how the Word of God should be proclaimed in word and deed to the world by means of moving from theory (word) to practice (deeds). In this view, it is important to highlight the concept of discernment which is significant in the sense that the interpretation of God's Word requires careful thought and reliance on the Holy Spirit through prayer and the study of God's Word to avoid making wrong interpretations that go against God's will. This agrees with the idea of inhabitational theology, which has to do with an interpretation of Scripture

that goes beyond moralistic thought to determine appropriate God-images in times of specific existential issues such as illness and stigma (Louw, 2008; Polling, 2010).

In other words, practical theology has to do with the adequate interpretation of the gospel that must foster transformation in the lives of people in order to change their present practices and encourage them to adopt a new way of living inspired by the Word of God after a careful interpretation (Fowler, 1985). This is what Dingemans (1996) means when he refers to the shift from the application of biblical data and statements of faith to the primary task of the investigation of Christian practice which leads to practical theology being understood as a science of action.

In this way, the solution to the Burundian crisis requires an accurate interpretation and application of God's Word, since it is the task of practical theology to challenge and "unmask the systematic distortions in the person, social, cultural, historical and religious models of human transformation" (Fowler, 1985:52). Thus, it is fair to refer to Practical Theology as an application of theology to life and ministry.

Regarding the role of practical theology in terms of finding a solution to the Burundian crisis, it will be helpful to look at Scripture and apply its interpretation to the situation in order to come up with a workable plan to deal with the prevailing conflict in Burundi. First of all, practical theology has to draw from the spirituality of Burundians in order to establish a plan of action on resolving the crisis in Burundi. Regarding the spirituality of Burundians, it is helpful to notice that, while the constitution establishes a secular state, it makes provision for freedom of religion, thereby respecting all religions and prohibiting religious discrimination. For that reason, Burundian citizens can be converted to a religion of their choice. In addition, all religions have the right to evangelise, work in schools, hospitals, and media; with freedom to build places of worship and do fundraising.¹¹ In Burundi, approximately 75% of the population is Christian (60% Roman Catholic and 15% Protestants), 20% Traditional Religions, 3% Muslim, with other religions occupying 2%.¹² From this analysis, Christianity is considered as the main religion, with the Catholic Church being powerful and dominant in its influence on all levels of Burundian society. During the civil war, Evangelical Churches have however mushroomed all over the country. President Pierre Nkurunziza is a born-again Christian with him and his wife being pastors in an evangelical church (Bouka & Nyabola, 2016; Wallis, 2015; Jones, 2014).

Amidst conflict and violence in Burundi, the church can make use of the Bible message to bring about reconciliation. In fact, since the majority of Burundians are Christian, the church can take the opportunity to emphasise the message of Christ in order to promote peace and reconciliation. In the course of conflicts, believers are admonished, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18). This attitude depicts the holiness between human beings that must be shown in the social, economic, and political areas

11 International Crisis Group. (2016). *Burundi: A Dangerous Third Term*. Africa Report N°235. Translated from French. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2HmW9HN> [Accessed 22 June 2017].

12 International Religious Freedom. (2015). *Burundi 2015 International Religious Freedom Report*, p.3.

of life and be expressed in public life (Chingota, 2006). In the same way, believers are told, “Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour’s life” (Lev 19:16). The love of the neighbour involves taking care of them and avoiding anything that may be harmful to others. In order to achieve this love of their neighbour, believers have to strive to “live in peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18). When believers live in peace with everyone, striving to live in harmony with one another instead of being responsible for any lack of peace in their communities or in their relationships with unbelievers (Kasali, 2006; Witmer, 2000). Peace is an integral part of Burundian culture. In their greetings, for example, Burundians use a basic greeting, “Amahoro!” which means, “Peace!” (Jacques, 2009). The use of such a greeting means that they wish each other peace on a daily basis. Christians in Burundi can therefore use that cultural dynamic to promote peace.

Furthermore, Christians are called to be salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13-16). Like salt which purifies, preserves and enhances the flavour of food; Christians are expected to influence society and make the earth a better and more wholesome place (Kapolyo, 2006). Just as the light shines to illumine the world and remove darkness (Kapolyo, 2006), Christians are to live by example and promote peace in a war torn country like Burundi. In this way, Christians will be known as “peacemakers” (Matt 5:9). According to Kapolyo (2006:1119), “Africa desperately needs men and women of peace, sons and daughters of God who make peacemaking a priority so that the continent may live in peace. The peacemakers are rightly called the sons of God because they demonstrate in reality not just their relationship with God but their participation in his most characteristic work. In so doing they establish realms where the kingdom of heaven is indeed effective.” In Burundian tradition, peacemaking is not a strange concept. Conflict resolution has always been part of Burundian culture. Whenever disputes occurred in the community, the *Bashingantahe*¹³ were there to intervene in order to restore peace by bringing together the disputing parties for reconciliation (Babatunde, 2014). Christians in Burundi can learn from this practice in order to effectively play the role of peacemaking and bring harmony in the country that is affected by conflicts.

Another aspect of reconciliation is telling the truth, which involves the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) in order rewrite history by correcting the distortions of the events that occurred during the interethnic conflicts in Burundi (Ntamahungiro, 2014). In a parliamentary session of 03 December 2014, the TRC was adopted in a vote that was boycotted by the Tutsi members of Parliament who thought the commission was dominated by the Hutu majority, even though Bishop Jean-Louis Nahimana (Hutu) of the Catholic Church was voted as the president of the commission, while Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi (Tutsi) of the Anglican Church was put in the position of the vice-president.¹⁴ The adopted Burundi TRC was given a mandate “to uncover

13 Bashingantahe is an institution that dates back to the 1600s and is comprised of an inter-ethnic council made up of elder tribesmen who have a ‘highly developed sense of justice and fairness and whose focus is primarily on reconciliation, peacekeeping, social cohesion, and harmony.

14 ‘Burundi: Adoption d’une Commission Vérité et Réconciliation’ *Arib News*, 3 December 2014. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2TvUiHW> [Accessed 20 January 2018].

the truth about the events that the country experienced between 1962 and 2008, and to start a process of transitional justice and collective forgiveness.”¹⁵ However, the TRC faced major challenges to accomplish its mandate due to the political crisis that followed shortly after the TRC was adopted.¹⁶

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON RECONCILIATION IN THE BURUNDI CRISIS

In order to understand the notion of reconciliation, it is useful to consider the origin of reconciliation. In fact, reconciliation starts with God Himself who is called the God of reconciliation (Ndlovu, 1999). After the fall of man, the relationship between God and man was broken, and God sought man for reconciliation. In Genesis 3:9-10, “But the Lord God called to the man, “where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” Because of sin, man was overwhelmed by fear and guilt so that God took the first step towards saving man, seeking the person confused by shame (Asohoto, & Ngewa, 2006). As a result, God acknowledged the shame, fear, and guilt that Adam and Eve felt because of their nakedness and provided them with garments of skin (Gen 3:21). God’s provision of garments of skin involved the shedding of blood, which foreshadows God’s removal of sin, with the final fulfilment in the shedding of Christ’s blood on the cross (Asohoto, & Ngewa, 2006).

Concerning the sacrifice offered by God to reconcile sinners to Himself, Paul writes, “For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Rom 5:10-11). In this way, the sinner can enjoy a restored relationship with God so as to receive the right to become His ambassador after being entrusted the ministry of reconciliation in the world (2 Cor 5:18-20). Christ’s death on the cross makes possible human reconciliation to God. Reconciliation involves removing rebellious and sinful man’s enmity toward God. This is one of the many marvellous accomplishments of the Godhead on behalf of a person the moment he believes in Christ for salvation from sin (Lowery, 2000). Schreiter (2013) refers to this type of reconciliation as *vertical reconciliation*. According to Merdassa (2014), it is the way of reconciliation that depends on man’s repentance and forgiveness in order to heal the broken relationship between God and human beings, whereby God opens the closed door and reveals Himself for His people in Christ.

After the vertical reconciliation has taken place between God and human beings, there follows another type of reconciliation called *horizontal reconciliation* that takes place between human beings, either in individuals or in groups (Schreiter, 2013). In this sense, “reconciliation in a biblical sense means to restore the relationships between

15 Human Rights Council. (2016). Report of the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) established pursuant to Human Rights. Council resolution S-24/1. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/39jd01d>. [Accessed 15 January 2018]

16 Human Rights Council. (2016), Report of the United Nations, pp.16-17.

people and God vertically, and among people horizontally through the redemptive work of Christ" (Merdassa, 2014:47). The horizontal reconciliation is best defined as the social level of reconciliation whereby God heals the victims whose perpetrators do not repent for their offences. For that reason, God operates through Christians to effect reconciliation in the lives of those who struggle to embrace reconciliation (Robinson, 2011). This kind of horizontal reconciliation is the one Jesus advocates for when He says, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5:23-24). In these verses, it is clear that the two types of reconciliation, namely vertical and horizontal, go hand in hand, so that "without reconciliation, gifts presented at the altar mean nothing" (Barbieri, 2000:30). In other words, "the teaching implies that even offering thanks to God is inappropriate for a person who had wronged another human being, suggesting once more that religion and ethics cannot be separated" (Robinson, 2011:24). Furthermore, as Merdassa (2014:12) relates, in order to make an acceptable offering to God, the one who goes to the altar to present an offering to God needs to first repent and forgive fellow brothers and sisters so that the horizontal reconciliation heals unhealthy relationships in the community. In that way, the relationship between God and man is healed vertically, making it possible for the horizontal relationship to be restored as well.

In the teaching about prayer, Jesus instructs His disciples to "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4). While prayer is directed to "Our Father in heaven" (Matt 6:9) which is a *vertical relationship*, it must also take into consideration the horizontal relationship between the worshiper and other people. In fact, the phrase "as we also have forgiven our debtors" is a reminder that we should be eager to forgive others as we seek from God (Kapolyo, 2006). Thus, while forgiveness brings into picture the generous, compassionate forgiveness of God to a pleading sinner who owes Him an unpayable debt, no one can claim to walk in fellowship with God and refuse to forgive others (Barbieri, 2000; Turaki, 2006). Hence, anyone who believes to have been forgiven by God should be ready to forgive small offenses against them by others. In the same way, in the situation of ethnic conflicts in Burundi, the church needs to facilitate reconciliation both vertically and horizontally by bringing a message of reconciliation to the community.

CONCLUSION

In the effort to bring reconciliation in the Burundian crisis, practical theology has a big role to play. This chapter has established that practical theology has to do with taking the Word of God from theory to practice through the correct interpretation. In this endeavour, the church is so instrumental in ensuring that the Word of God is put in practice. In Burundi where ethnic conflicts have been persisting for a long time, the church has already played a role toward reconciliation through speaking out against violence and creating programs aiming at bringing about reconciliation among the conflicting parties. Burundi is a country that is predominantly Christian. Thus, the majority of people in Burundi can follow the teaching of Christ in order to

practice reconciliation and forgiveness in the effort to live in peace with each other regardless the ethnic, political, religious, and regional identity. In order to achieve that, the church needs to help people understand the correct interpretation of God's word based on historical, cultural, religious, and social aspects of Burundian society. Furthermore, the church needs to avoid any implication into the conflicts. It is only by being neutral that the church will be able to preach peace, justice, unity, forgiveness, in order to promote lasting reconciliation for a healthy society.

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